

I am honoured to join you this evening to acknowledge and celebrate the 73rd anniversary of Israeli independence.

As all of you well know, the journey to independence was not without significant sacrifice and the decades since not without threats and challenges, but today Israel takes its place amongst the family of nations. Democratic, modern and progressive.

Israel's first Prime Minister Ben Gurion could not have been more accurate or visionary when he said decades ago:

*"Israel's economic and cultural progress is due to three things: the pioneering spirit that inspired the best of our immigrant and Israeli youth, who respond to the challenge of our desolate areas and ingathering of the exiles; the feeling of Diaspora Jewry that they are partners in the enterprise of Israel's resurgence in the ancient homeland of the Jewish people; and the power of science and technology which Israel unceasingly and not without success, tries to enhance."*

In relation to the Jewish Diaspora, the Jewish community in NSW and Australia epitomises the partnership Ben Gurion spoke about. You exemplify outstanding citizenship in the contribution you have made to the success and strength of our state and nation and equally you support and contribute to the integrity of the state of Israel.

And as for science and technology, Israel is indisputably one of the world's leaders in these spheres. NSW looks forward to building on our bilateral relationships in areas such as artificial intelligence, cyber security, medical research and fintech.

Whilst Israel continues to thrive as a nation we cannot deny that the threats to safety and security are ongoing.

Whilst tonight is an evening of celebration, it must also be an evening to renew our vigilance against anti-semitism and injustice.

During my Premiership I have had the honour of meeting with both the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli President Rivkin. The relationship between our jurisdictions is strong and deep and positively evolving. I was very much looking forward to my trade mission to Israel in April last year, but was forced to cancel due to COVID. I look forward to undertaking this mission as soon as

international travel becomes possible again.

Thank you to all of you for your efforts in supporting NSW during a very difficult 2-year period.

Thank you for your efforts in support of a strong and independent Israel as it enters its 74th year as a sovereign nation.

Let's join together in proposing a toast to the people and the State of Israel.

L'chaim - to life.

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I know you won't mind if I also take this opportunity to make a very special presentation.

In 2004 one Vic Alhadeff took on the role as the CEO of the Jewish Board of Deputies. I understand that tonight is his last official function in that role. His advocacy, vigilance and persistence over almost 17 years has been truly outstanding.

As a colleague and friend of long-standing, I can also attest to his contribution to the harmonious multicultural society we enjoy in NSW. His work in strengthening interfaith ties and at times dealing with very difficult and sensitive issues has endeared him to the broader community.

I therefore take great pleasure and pride in presenting him with an award on behalf of the people of NSW.